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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 4301  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3126  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9871  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3220  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2297  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA PRIORITY 0227  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 6812  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 4676  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1296  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001363

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: LOCAL CO-CHAIR REPRESENTATIVES ASK  
PRESIDENT RAJAPAKSA FOR CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES, SUPPORT  
FOR NGOS

REF: COLOMBO 1331 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: CDA JAMES R. MOORE FOR REASONS 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Colombo representatives of the Tokyo Donors Co-Chairs Conference (US, EU, Norway, and Japan) met with Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa and several members of his cabinet August 21 to reiterate the message from the August 11 Co-Chairs statement calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities and expressing concern over the growing humanitarian crisis. The EU Ambassador urged the President to make a public statement urging respect for NGO efforts. Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) interlocutors continued to maintain that current military actions were purely defensive against Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) aggression, but did agree to offer greater public support for NGOs. End summary.

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CO-CHAIRS URGE CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES,  
GSL REITERATES "IF THE LTTE STOPS, WE STOP"  
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12. (C) Colombo Representatives of the Tokyo Donors Co-Chairs Conference (US, EU, Norway, and Japan) called on Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa and members of his cabinet August 121. The Chiefs of Mission group consisted of:

EU Ambassador Julian Wilson  
Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar  
US Charge' James Moore  
Japanese Charge' Nobuaki Ito  
German Charge' Wolfgang Erdmannsdoerfer (on behalf of the  
Finns, who hold the EU presidency but do not have  
representation in Colombo)

In addition to President Mahinda Rajapaksa, the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) delegation included:  
Presidential Secretary Lalith Weeratunga  
Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera  
Foreign Secretary HMGS Palihakkara

Minister for Refugees, Resettlement, and Human Rights Mahinda Samarasinghe  
Head of the Peace Secretariat Palitha Kohona

13. (C) Ambassador Wilson began by referring to the co-chairs' August 11 statement, which called for an immediate cessation of hostilities. Wilson asked about the GSL's strategic orientation in terms of the current conflict. As in all previous discussions with GSL interlocutors (refs), President Rajapaksa maintained that current action is defensive. Discussing the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), he said, "We have not started it. If they stop, we stop." He added that the GSL could not permit the LTTE to take control of Trincomalee Harbor in the east or the northern Jaffna peninsula, but reassured, "I am committed to the Cease-Fire Agreement." Foreign Minister (FM) Samaraweera interjected, "This war is essentially a series of defensive actions" on the GSL's part. Speaking about the request to cease hostilities, President Rajapaksa said, "There is nothing for me to stop. When (the LTTE) are attacking, only then we attack."

14. (C) In response to Ambassador Wilson's question as to whether there would be military action to gain control of Sampur on the east coast, President Rajapaksa said Sampur had not been allotted to the LTTE in the 2002 Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA), and that the LTTE was using Sampur to launch attacks on Trincomalee Harbor. According to Rajapaksa and Peace Secretariat Head Kohona, the LTTE took control of Sampur in violation of the CFA, but to date the GSL had taken no steps to reclaim the area. Ambassador Brattskar asked whether, if both sides stopped fighting, the GSL would decide

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not to initiate a campaign to gain Sampur. President Rajapaksa responded, "I should leave Sampur for the LTTE to come and attack from there? Is that what you're asking me to do?" FM Samaraweera said the GSL seeks a verifiable guarantee from LTTE leader Prabhakaran that the Tigers will not use Sampur as a base to attack Trincomalee before the GSL will consider ending the current military campaign.

15. (C) Charge' Moore reiterated Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (PDAS) Steven Mann's message that a "breathing

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space" is necessary to de-escalate the current violence (septel). Charge' Moore said that despite the twenty plus years of conflict, the GSL, as a democratically accountable state, must set an example and make the first move in ceasing hostilities. President Rajapaksa was resolute that the GSL's offer to negotiate with the LTTE was tantamount to such a gesture, saying, "We have taken the first step for peace. We are just waiting!"

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HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS  
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16. (C) Ambassador Wilson re-delivered part of a demarche he had delivered a week earlier. Begin draft EU demarche: "The EU is deeply concerned about the culture of one-sided criticism of NGOs that has emerged in recent months. While free speech must be applauded, the criticism of the NGOs is not balanced-- it fails to see the value of work being done by NGOs, and it is leading to bad treatment of NGOs in terms of restricted access and their own security. The GSL must tackle this, especially showing itself unequivocally in favor of the work the majority of NGOs are doing. The GSL has failed to prevent attacks on NGOs in their controlled areas. There have also not been successful investigations of past attacks. The Muttur attack is the latest of a string of such events. It is a shocking violation of human rights that has not been seen anywhere in the world outside of Iraq and Sudan." End draft text.

17. (C) Ambassador Wilson then expressed hope that the murder of the 17 NGO employees in Muttur could be expediently investigated, and he asked President Rajapaksa to make a public statement of reassurance to the NGO community. President Rajapaksa spoke of the need for NGOs to be financially accountable, and FM Samaraweera said Sri Lanka has one of "the most NGO-friendly environments" in the world. He spoke of the need for NGOs to abide by a code of conduct. President Rajapaksa noted that some NGOs were viewed as fronts for the LTTE. Ambassador Wilson agreed with the need for accountability, but said the NGO employee murders in Muttur "crossed a line" and again asked for the GSL's public support for the good work the majority of NGOs carry out. Human Rights Minister Samarasinghe replied that he would meet with NGO representatives to relay GSL support, and said perhaps the President could make a statement to similar effect following such a meeting. Samarasinghe said, "A public reassurance is needed, I agree with you."

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SLMM  
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18. (C) The discussion then turned to the exit of EU citizen monitors from the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, with Norwegian Ambassador Brattskar explaining that security concerns were forcing the SLMM to suspend operations. Peace Secretariat Head Kohona said the "link" between the EU ban on

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the LTTE, the Tigers' subsequent demand that the EU citizen monitors leave, and the SLMM's current decision to withdraw EU citizen monitors was "troubling." Ambassador Wilson replied that it was primarily the media that drew such a link. Wilson noted that the security of EU citizens was

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tantamount, and if one party to the conflict could not guarantee the safety of the monitors, they had to withdraw for security concerns. Ambassador Brattskar said Sweden may support the SLMM mission from Colombo for some time despite withdrawing monitors from the field, and he added that Iceland and Norway are both sending more monitors to shore up SLMM efforts.

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COMMENT  
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19. (C) The GSL has received similar messages from PDAS Mann, the Charge', and representatives from the EU and other governments several times over the last two weeks. The GSL delegation seemed mildly irritated to hear the same points, and replied in kind with stock answers. Each referred to the GSL's "defensive actions" and insisted that only LTTE leader Prabhakaran could make the decision to end the current hostilities. With the President and other GSL interlocutors portraying all military actions as defensive, including a potential move forward to capture Sampur, a cessation of hostilities in the near-term appears unlikely. The one positive outcome was the GSL commitment to publicly offer support for NGOs, which is especially welcome in light of growing humanitarian needs. End comment.  
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